

POSITION OF WOMEN

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562 The position of women in the Caucasus was in many respects subordinate to that of men: male children were preferred, descent was patrilineal, residence patrilocal, women were excluded from inheritance rights; in case the headwoman was unable to reconcile a quarrel among the female members of the family, the case was put before the headman; divorces were in general more easily obtained by men than by women, and in the case of adultery the husband had the right to kill or disfigure his wife. The Circassian code of behavior forbade women to sit down while men were standing, and the husband was addressed in terms of respect by his wife. In most areas the women led a life of hard work; besides doing the housework, they also assisted in the work in the field, though certain activities such as tending horses and in most cases ploughing were performed by men only. Among the Georgian mountaineers, women were regarded from a religious point of view as unclean, and were forbidden to enter the walled precincts of the sanctuaries; the Svan had sexual avoidance rules to ensure success in hunting expeditions; in Mingrelia a woman may not kill a chicken or animal she is going to prepare, as this would spoil the food.

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584 the passivity of the couple reflects their submission to the *patria potestas* and
593 perfectly agrees with all we have said about the freedom of choice. The girl is usually more passive than the young man, a fact that corresponds to the greater privilege of the latter to choose his own mate. Although the Caucasian customs of matchmaking and engagement are strongly patriarchal in colouring, we do not wish to say that betrothal as such is a patriarchal trait. On the contrary, elaborate engagement ceremonies are found especially among matriarchal peoples.⁴³

§ 2. PRIVILEGES AND OBLIGATIONS ARISING FROM BETROTHAL

There are three distinct obligations that we must consider: (1) mutual avoidance especially in public, (2) mutual fidelity, (3) and the obligation of entering upon marriage with one's engaged partner.

1. Mutual Avoidance

584 The NORTHWESTERN CAUCASIANS. An *adat* for the Black Sea
834 Cordon Line, Kuban and Terek Territories speaks of the strict obligation of the betrothed to avoid one another in public. Should they accidentally meet in the presence of others, they may not speak to one another; in fact, they are forbidden even to pass a glance at each other.⁴⁴ Of course, sexual intercourse is strictly
[836] forbidden and severely punished (*infra*, pp. 168—179).

The NORTHEASTERN CAUCASIANS. In Chechnia, as soon as the father of the girl gives his consent and the suitor's family has presented their future daughter-in-law with the prescribed engagement gift of ten silver rubles and a silk kerchief, the young man has the right to meet his beloved, but only in private. If another person is present, the bride-to-be must turn her back to her lover.⁴⁵ Betrothal, however, does not give the pair the right to sexual relations.⁴⁶ When speaking of the Lesghians⁴⁷ we must distinguish between three distinct classes of *adats* regarding mutual avoidance: (1) sometimes the engaged couple is strictly forbidden to meet, be it in public or private (if they do meet, it is done stealthily), (2) among some Lesghian peoples they are permitted to meet at the girl's house, (3) among the Tsunta-Akhvakh the *adats* permit engaged
[836] couples even to sleep together (*infra*, p. 181 f.).

The *adats* of some of the mountain tribes of SOUTH CAUCASUS strictly forbid engaged couples ever to meet in public or in private. It may happen that

⁴³ Thurnwald, "Verlobnis," Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte, XIV, p. 133.

⁴⁴ Leontovič, II, p. 217, 194. Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 429: "Posle sgovora ženich imēet pravo ~~videt'sja~~ tajno s' svoej nevěstoj; no pri postoronnich ljudjach priličie trebuet ne tol'ko ne ~~govorit~~ meždu soboj, no i ne smotret' drug na druga."

⁴⁵ Berže, *op. cit.*, pp. 97 f.

⁴⁶ *Infra*, pp. 169—176.

⁴⁷ L'vov, *op. cit.*, p. 22 f.; Amirov, "Sredi gorcev severnago Dagestana," SSKG, VII (1873), p. 30; Omarov, "Kak život Laki," SSKG, IV (1871), pp. 16 ff.; Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 564.

the couple does not become acquainted with one another till their wedding day.⁴⁸ In Khevsuria the girl used to move into the house of her future father-in-law before her marriage, and there she would take part in the family work for three to fourteen days, but all this time she was not allowed to associate with anyone except the female members of the family. After that she returned to her own household and lived there for two weeks at least (sometimes two or three years), during which time she was not allowed to meet her lover. In fact, he was even forbidden to enter her village.⁴⁹ In Pshavia, as we have seen above (p. 105), the engaged couple is allowed to meet frequently.

The obligation of mutual avoidance is also observed by the neighbouring OSSETES.⁵⁰

In this regard the neighbouring TARTARS do not differ either. The Kumyk may visit his future wife only privately and is strictly forbidden to speak to her in the presence of others.⁵¹ The Karachai suitor is forbidden to speak not only with his beloved but also with his future parents-in-law.⁵²

2. Mutual Fidelity

The *adats* of the North Caucasians do not tell us whether the obligation is bilateral or not. The female partner, of course, is strictly bound to fidelity as will be clear from our exposition of the proof of virginity demanded of the bride on her wedding night (*infra*, p. 124) and from Chapter XII on sexual violations.

3. The Obligation of Entering upon Marriage

Islamic law gives both parties the right to dissolve the engagement at will.⁵³ It will be interesting to find out whether in this particular case the *adats* are observed or the *ia'i'a*.

THE NORTHWESTERN CAUCASIANS. The "Collection of *adats* for the Black Sea-Cordon Line, Kuban and Terek Territories" (§ 195) informs us that "the man has a right to break his engagement at will; and, at the request of his fiancée or her relatives, he may permit the girl to withdraw her promises."⁵⁴ This *adat* clearly shows that the obligation is unilateral. "The girl [or her family] may not break the engagement without her fiancé's consent."⁵⁴

THE NORTHEASTERN CAUCASIANS. The following table will give us a good idea of the Chechen *adats*.

⁴⁸ Dubrovin, *Istorijs*, I, ii, p. 309.

⁴⁹ M. O. Korven, "Peržitki matriachata u narodov Kavkaza," SE, 1936, No. 4-5, p. 216.

⁵⁰ Dubrovin, *Istorijs*, I, i, p. 333; Byhan, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁵¹ Dubrovin, *Istorijs*, I, i, p. 638.

⁵² Byhan, *op. cit.*, pp. 243 f.

⁵³ Juynboll, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

⁵⁴ Leontovič, II, p. 257, § 196.

§ 2. PROBLEMS AND CONCLUSIONS

Though the wedding ceremonies just described are not without a few traces ⁵⁸⁵ of a mother-right culture, the wedding as a whole is doubtless typically patriarchal in character.

(1) The wedding procession clearly shows that the marriage is patrilocal, ⁵⁹¹ a fact true of all North Caucasian as well as neighbouring tribes. The bride must move into the house of her father-in-law.

(2) The fact that the bride is humiliated before her mother-in-law (not ⁶⁰⁶ father-in-law), the fact that she is invited into the household by the mother-⁵⁹² in-law (not father-in-law), and that it is the mother-in-law (not father-in-law) who places the honey into the mouth of the bride, though very suspiciously matriarchal, is reconcilable with a strictly patriarchal society. Even in a strictly patriarchal society the mother of the household enjoys certain privileges and is looked upon as the mistress of the house with special authority over the female members of the household. In other words, in these seemingly matriarchal ceremonies the mother-in-law may perhaps be simply exercising a right of the mother of the household of a typical patriarchal family.¹⁰³

(3) The dramatization of bride capture is a very common custom among ⁵⁸³ the pastoral peoples throughout the world.

Ceremonial bride capture must not be considered as a survival of actual marriage by capture. This is especially true of the Caucasians because a wedding always means a great economic loss for the bride's family—one of their workers must leave them and go over to another sib. Ceremonial bride capture expresses rather the opposition to such an heavy loss. The Dido, as we have seen, actually throw mud and filth at the bride after she has been "stolen". If the ceremony were to represent actual abduction, why should the bride be so "mistreated"? The reason why filth is thrown at her is that she has turned "traitor" to her own family.

(4) The ceremony of hiding, veiling of the face, the bride's taciturnity—⁸³⁴ all these little peculiarities of the Caucasian wedding may be an expression of the bride's natural sense of modesty. Till now she had to avoid, at least in public, the slightest communication with her fiancé. The strict separation of engaged couples, the prohibition even to pass a glance at one's future mate in public, and the death penalty imposed on the girl for pre-marital intercourse—all this is in full accord with the high esteem of pastoral peoples for the physical integrity of virgins. At the wedding, the bride is being publicly introduced ^[831] into a relationship which she has been taught to shun as disgraceful, even punishable by death. Now this once "disgraceful" thing is being done publicly! The bride's resistance, her fleeing, her veiling, her taciturnity, then, are expressions of a reaction against "the great change,"¹⁰⁴ from maidenhood to wife, a change more sensibly felt among pastoral peoples than in any other society.

¹⁰³ For the relatively important rôle of a mother of a household in a patriarchal society see E. Pélina, "Obrjad gostepriimstva v Osetii," SE, (1932), No. 5—6, pp. 140—163, especially p. 156, note.

¹⁰⁴ "The great change," I think, has been coined by Elsie C. Person. See her "Holding back in Crisis Ceremonialism," *American Anthropologist*, n. s. XVIII (1916), pp. 44 f.

684 man. He loved his mother as every faithful son should. In fact, he loved her
 [538] with an exceptionally deep filial love. But alas! How painful it must have
 [837] been for him to learn that his mother, whom he so worshipped, had an illicit
 lover! His heart burst with grief and rage. Nika Bulat at once rushed to
 the adulterer's home; his eyes flashed with rage as he whipped out his dagger
 and plunged it into the lover's heart. Nika Bulat then hacked off his head and
 hands, and took these gory limbs and head to his mother, and staring at her
 for a moment as if he had gone mad, dropped them at her feet. On seeing
 her furious son and especially the gruesome sight before her, she burst into tears,
 but tears that only served to make Nika Bulat's blood boil with rage even
 still more violently. With one thrust of his dagger, his mother lay dying
 beside the head and hands she once so wrongfully loved to clasp. But that is
 not the end of the tragedy. Nika Bulat's sisters were present and witnessed all.
 They fell down on their knees, weeping bitterly on their mother's breast, as
 she bled and gasped. But Nika Bulat did not allow his sisters to weep. That
 same dagger was whipped out once again, and like a flash plunged into the heart
 of one of his sisters, and then into the heart of the other, thus putting an end
 to their sobs, sobs that were, in eyes of Nika Bulat, an approval of their
 mother's crime. For this great act of heroism Nika Bulat was admired by all
 and proclaimed the head of the village.³¹

• [834] This abhorrence of sexual crimes is brought out further by the fact that any
 accidental touch of the bare hand of a strange woman is considered a violation,
 and both are regarded as "unclean."³² Especially in danees all physical contact
 must be scrupulously avoided, no matter how small and crowded the room may
 be. Baddeley describes how the dancers curve in and out within a few inches
 of each other, but never is there even the slightest bodily contact, "the breach
 of this observance, even inadvertently, leading to many a fatal quarrel. A
 husband, brother or lover, looking on with jealous eye, would whip out his
 'kinjal' at the mere suspicion of a touch..."³³ A further reflexion of this
 extreme sensitivity is the considerably large number of *adats* which make no
 distinction between mere contact and actual rape. In the Districts of Hyuraki,
 Uisha, and Mugn, for example, actual rape, attempted rape, and a mere
 suspicious touch or approach are all equally punished.³⁴

684 Homosexuality is punished as severely as voluntary illicit relations between
 838 persons of the opposite sex. To mention but a few examples: in Hyuraki
 District, the two persons caught in the act may be killed on the spot by their
 relatives, or else, if spared, each must pay a fine of three oxen to the community,
 and both persons are banished for a year, not to mention other penalties;³⁵ in

³¹ Cf. Dirr, AGKB, pp. 73 f.

³² L'vov, "Domaŋnaja i semŋnaja Žizn Dagestanskich gorcev Avarskago plemeni," SSKG, III (1870), p. 21.

³³ Baddeley, *op. cit.*, II, p. 13.

³⁴ Cf. "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," SSKG, VII (1873), pp. 65, 91, 105.

³⁵ "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," p. 92. To free one's self from a charge of homosexuality
 40 confessors are required just as in the case of murder (*ibid.*).

684 unjust death penalty. (5) Finally, the adulteress was merely divorced; she lost her right to the *kebin*, while the *kalym* had to be returned to the husband. The adulterer was obliged to pay a fine.

Amputation of the adulteress' ears and nose is a punishment found in the *adats* of all Caucasians. It is interesting to note that a Hittite code (about 1350 B.C.) engraved on a stele has been dug up, which expressly legalized such mutilation in case of adultery.⁶⁸ This code may be based on a substratum of customary laws which are now preserved in the isolated *awls* of the Caucasus.

2. Motives

The main motives for punishing sexual offenses seem to be: (1) in case of defloration, the girl loses her value and consequently the family suffers a great economic loss;⁶⁹ (2) there is a serious danger of a stranger being born into the sacred sanctuary of the home and later treated as a legitimate member and even as head of the family (*supra*, p. 126).

3. Reports regarding Sexual Laxity of the Caucasians

834 In view of such severe penalties as we have described above, we cannot
[832] help being suspicious about some of the reports regarding laxity of morals among
[833] the mountain tribes of the Caucasus. The Kuban Cherkess are supposed to have
[834] formerly been proud of the fact that their wives attracted other men. Every
woman had to have a lover to prove her true value.⁶⁷ Longworth's report, to
mention but another example, contrasts the scrupulousness after marriage with
"their unconstrained demeanor before marriage."⁶⁸ "The maidens of Circassia
are allowed a latitude in their behaviour which is elsewhere unknown; not only
do they talk and dance with the other sex, but when they please, they exercise
their blandishments to an extent that to a stranger is no less perplexing than
agreeable."⁶⁹ Then there are the many reports about public religious hetaerism.
[835] Interiano claims that at funerals of prominent personages a very strange sort
[836] of sacrifice takes place: a girl of 12 to 14 years of age is placed upon a skin
of an ox that has just been slaughtered and in the presence of men and women
a robust young man of the community must try to deflower her. After several
failures, the young man promises to marry her (or makes some other promises),
and then the girl usually consents.⁷⁰ There are also the reports about sexual
hospitality, for example, in the "Relation du Sieur Ferrand médecin du Khan
des Tatares, touchant la Crimée, les Tartares-Nogaies et ce qui se passe au serail
du dit Khan,"⁷¹ in *Voyage historiques et géographique dans les pays situés entre
la Mer Caspienne par Edouard Barbier du Bocage et de Baert*, as well as in the

⁶⁷ H. C. E. Zacharias, *Protohistory*, p. 258.

⁶⁸ *Supra*, pp. 126 f.

⁶⁹ Durr, AGKB, pp. 81 f.

⁷⁰ Longworth, *A Year among the Circassians*, I, p. 286.

⁷¹ Longworth, *op. cit.*, I, p. 216.

⁷² Ladyženskij, FT, p. 183, Durr's note.

⁷³ In *Recueil des Voyages au Nord*, Amsterdam, 1718.

writings of the Arabs al-Mas'ūdī and Abu-El-Kasim. They claim that the father offers one of his daughters to his guest as a mere point of hospitality. Stählin⁷² claimed that illegitimate children were treated the same as legitimate. On the other hand, a large number of authors, such as Struys, Lamberti,⁷³ Neumann,⁷⁴ and others, claim that the Cherkess women are extremely modest. The true solution, to these conflicting reports is the one suggested by Ladyženskij.⁷⁵ "Der richtigsten Standpunkt nimmt in der Frage Garni ein (Reisen in den Ländern der asiatischen Türkei und des Kaukasus, 1854). Er betont die Keuschheit der freien Frauen und den Hetarismus der Sklavinnen." This is also Dirr's opinion.⁷⁶ In other words, the reports are true only to a certain extent: the freewomen are exceptionally modest, while the slaves exceptionally immodest, religious prostitution and sexual hospitality being restricted to slaves. Such conduct in regard to freewomen would be impossible considering the great economic loss the family would suffer from defloration, considering also the virginity test, and, finally, the fear of illegitimate children. On the other hand, defloration, virginity, and illegitimate children in the case of slaves would offer no serious difficulty. [86]

We have a similar problem in regard to some of the Lesghians. As we have mentioned above, Herodotus wrote of the Lesghians that "they copulate in public as beasts are wont to do."⁷⁷ Przewalski reported that at Tsunta-Akhvakh unmarried couples were allowed to sleep together.⁷⁸ Baddeley confirms Przewalski's report: "It is the custom for a host to give his guest one of his daughters or some other girl to sleep with. The couple may... do what they like provided the maidenhead remains intact; and even that depends on the fair one's goodwill. But should the guest so far forget himself as to force her, he will pay for it with his life. Those people think meanly of a girl who has never slept with an honoured guest."⁷⁹ Baddeley's guide, a native of Ossetia, "accepted this as a fact, and added that something of the same sort went on in certain of the older Cossack 'stanitsas' on the Terek, instancing Tchervlen-naya."⁸⁰ Herodotus' report is useless, for we do not know exactly who is meant but there is no reason to doubt Przewalski and Baddeley. However, we wish to stress that this is a custom found exclusively in Tsunta-Akhvakh and is, by no means, the picture of entire Daghestan. Tsunta-Akhvakh is only a village (in 1901 it had only 415 inhabitants), which constitutes an exception

⁷² Jacob v. Stählin, *Nachrichten von Tschirkassien oder von dem Karbardinischen Lande*, 1771, referred to by Ladyženskij, FT, p. 185.

⁷³ Cf. Ladyženskij, l. c.

⁷⁴ Neumann, *Rußland und die Tscherkessen*, cf. Ladyženskij, l. c.

⁷⁵ Ladyženskij, l. c. Ladyženskij, "Zur Erforschung der Rechtsgewohnheiten, etc.," pp. 243 f.

⁷⁶ Ladyženskij, FT, p. 184. Cf. Castagné, "Le droit coutumier familial des montagnards du Caucase," p. 252: "Supposer que le montagnard adighé pût proposer sa fille ou sa femme à un hôte, serait compréhensible si la femme des montagnards avait été esclave, mais cela n'étant pas, une supposition de ce genre doit être considéré comme sans fondement aucun."

⁷⁷ Cited by Potocki, *Voyage dans les steps d'Astrakhan et du Caucase*, I, p. 240; to which Potocki adds, "Celle de quelques vallées du Caucase sont encore très libres."

⁷⁸ Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 189.

⁷⁹ Baddeley, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 13 f.

⁸⁰ Baddeley, *op. cit.*, II, p. 14.

(5) and the *patria potestas*¹⁵ in the extreme form as found in North Caucasias are all typically pastoral nomadic.

(6) The father alone has the right to choose a mate for his children, and boys are given more consideration in the choice than the girls.¹⁶ [593]

(7) The *bride price*, though found in other cultures also, has a typically pastoral colouring in the Caucasias, since it is measured mainly in cattle and horses.¹⁷ Bride wealth as a *price* in the strict sense of the word is found almost exclusively among pastoral peoples.¹⁸

(8) *Bride stealing*¹⁹ is a common practice among pastoral nomads. All Turco-Tartars, Indo-Europeans, and the Semites have or at least have had frequent recourse to marriage by capture.

(9) The various *engagement prohibitions*,²⁰

(10) the segregation of the bride in a special hut (*amhara*), the obligation of the young man to cover his entire head and face except for an opening for his eyes,²¹ the obligation of the bride and groom to hide during the wedding,²² the bride's veiling, taciturnity, resistance, the post-nuptial obligation of the couple not to appear together before their parents or older brethren,²³ all these customary laws are in no way a vestige of former group marriage, fraternal polyandry, bride capture and the like, as we have sufficiently refuted above, but they are most likely an expression of the extreme modesty peculiar to pastoral peoples, a reaction to the "great change" from single to married life, more strongly felt among pastoral nomads than any other peoples.

(11) It is the male side who proposes to the female and not vice versa,²⁴ likewise a phenomenon found infallibly among pastoral nomads.

(12) The great longing for children, especially for boys,²⁵ although found in other cultures, reaches its highest point among pastoral nomads. Connected with this craving after male children is the custom of marrying a second wife in case the first is sterile or "unable" to bear male offspring. [842]

(13) The *wedding customs*²⁶ are typically pastoral nomadic in character: dramatization of bride capture, horse-racing, the proof of virginity with subsequent rejoicing if the bride is found "chaste," or mutilation and execution if found "unchaste," the special ceremonies and wishes for fertility, especially for the birth of many male children, the triple encircling of the fireplace, etc. are all typically pastoral nomadic.

¹⁵ *Supra*, pp. 183—186.

¹⁶ *Supra*, pp. 76—81.

¹⁷ *Supra*, pp. 82—91.

¹⁸ *Supra*, p. 91.

¹⁹ *Supra*, pp. 91—96.

²⁰ *Supra*, pp. 106—110.

²¹ Seidlitz, "Die Abchasen," *Globus*, LXVI (1894), p. 40.

²² *Supra*, p. 124.

²³ *Supra*, p. 166. For similar customs among the ancient Indo-Europeans see *infra*, p. 198.

²⁴ *Supra*, pp. 100—106.

²⁵ *Supra*, pp. 124, 139 ff.

²⁶ *Supra*, pp. 125—128, especially Table 16.

† *Le. trait found among the Caucasians—Analyst*